

VZCZCXRO3967
RR RUEHPOD
DE RUEHVJ #0492/01 1100842
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 200842Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0067
RUEHPS/AMEMBASSY PRISTINA 0182
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA 0062
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB 0605
RUEHTI/AMEMBASSY TIRANA 0168
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 0080
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA 0063
RUEHLJ/AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA 0111
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0181
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0327
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE 0297
RUEHPNH/NVC PORTSMOUTH 0027

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000492

DEPT FOR CA/EX,CA/FPP, CA/VO, AND EUR/SCE (MIKE FOOKS); DEPT ALSO
PASS TO KCC; POSTS FOR FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGERS; VIENNA FOR DHS
MARLA BELVEDERE; DEPT ALSO PASS TO DHS SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [CPAS](#) [ASEC](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: Bosnia FPU visits Roma community in Bijeljina.

¶1. [Summary] Sarajevo Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) visited the Roma community in the Bosnian city of Bijeljina, the second largest town in the Republika Srpska. Bijeljina, once considered the largest and the richest Roma community in all Bosnia, now shows signs of economic distress, a likely factor in our recent uptick in Roma consular cases. [End of Summary]

¶2. (SBU) Our FPU met with three representatives of the Roma NGO "Association of Roma from RS": President Pasaga Beganovic, Vice President Hamdija Husic, and Mr. Husic's wife, Sofija Ivanov, who works on women and children issues. The consular section recently received several non-immigrant visa applications from Roma, as well as fraudulent documents for a U.S. citizenship claim from members of this community.

¶3. The Roma population in Bijeljina today is estimated to be between 3,000-4,000, a decrease of 50% from the pre-war numbers. During the war, the population declined to about 300 Roma. These were the poorest families, and most of them were harassed by extremist groups. The other Roma found their way to Western Europe, and an estimated 1,000 went to the United States. While some Roma have returned to Bijeljina, one complication for potential donors to these returnees is in identifying who are local Roma versus newly-arrived Roma from Serbia or Kosovo. As with the 60,000 Serb newcomers that settled in Bijeljina from other parts of Bosnia, there are often tensions over receipt of donated funds between new and old groups.

¶4. Economic opportunities for the Bijeljina Roma are scarce. Roma income is derived primarily from collecting and selling used metal (iron, copper, aluminum). As the global prices plummet, from highs of 300 euro to lows of 20 euro for one ton of recycled iron, the Roma are encountering even more dire economic conditions.

¶5. NGO representatives say there are virtually no Roma officially employed in any municipality service, government-owned, or privately-owned companies in Bijeljina. Native Roma who applied for donations of agriculture machinery were all rejected. Often already living below the poverty line, the Roma claim that the local government is discriminating against them by not paying much attention to their basic needs. In one instance, they said that even attempts to rename local streets in the Roma community for their heroes and celebrities have been ignored.

¶6. Roma representatives informed FPU about an alleged scam to enter the European Union. Namely, all three of the representatives stated that for a price between 2,000-3,000 euro, facilitators would

provide "sometimes forged and sometimes genuine" visas for European Union countries.

¶7. Name changing also seems to be a common tactic for those Roma who were forced to leave Germany and other Schengen countries. They routinely come back to Bijeljina and legally change their names. Once they acquire a new name, they obtain new documents and passports that help them return to the same countries with a new identity.

¶8. Roma family life continues to be conducted in traditional ways. The majority of Roma marriages are not officially registered with the municipality or local religious denominations, but rather performed in accordance with their traditions. The master of ceremonies is called "Stari svat" and he plays the role of both public registrar and priest. Very often the bride and groom are not older than 15. In Bijeljina, family size ranges between four to a dozen children. The Roma leaders also stated that many Western European Roma come to Bijeljina in search of spouses, and those couples tend to have their wedding ceremonies only after they leave Bosnia and return to their country of residence.

¶9. Although Roma NGOs are making visible efforts to organize literacy courses, and in spite of the fact that there are increasing number of Roma children enrolled in the regular elementary schools, most of the Bijeljina Roma women and children are illiterate.

¶10. In the largest Roma neighborhood in Bijeljina, FPU noted that the size of their houses range from shacks to very large, expensive and richly decorated buildings. Those with funds to build large houses are generally the Roma that have returned from Western

SARAJEVO 00000492 002 OF 002

Europe.

¶11. Comment: Bijeljina's Roma population is familiar with adversity. They suffered greatly in World War II, and then the 1992-1995 war brought them additional suffering. The remaining Roma in Bijeljina do not hide their wish to leave their hometown in order to work abroad, mainly in Western Europe, but increasingly in the United States as well. End comment.

English